# JOURNAL OF MEDIA AND INFORMATION WARFARE

## Centre For Media And Information Warfare Studies

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# The Many Faces And Facets Of War: Redrawing The Boundaries And Focus Of Warfare In Contemporary International Affairs

**Dr. Tang Siew Mun**

*From the times of the Roman legion to the thunderous roar of the Soviet T-34 tanks, wars have shaped and literally drawn the boundaries of humanity. Although wars in contemporary times are less frequent than a few centuries ago, modern wars are more lethal and destructive. It is this singular feature – large scale destruction – that sets wars apart from other forms of conflict. Wars have been waged in various intensities and degrees and by diverse actors, but have traditionally been seen as the domain of states. In medieval times, wars were the "sports" of kings. Conceptually, war is defined as an armed conflict involving at least two nation-states. How does this characterization of war explain the types of conflicts that imperil a state's national interest and well-being without the use of force? How does this definition reconcile itself with the almost "war-like" threats posed by non-state actors? How does a state defend itself against foreign penetration and dissemination of information detrimental to its political stability and survival? This paper addresses these issues and argues that the traditional definition of war is too narrow. Wars are fought on many fronts and may not necessarily involve the use of armed violence. Globalization has brought to the fore new challenges to state sovereignty and security. Issues such as trade wars and the spread of pandemic diseases do not fall under the traditional understanding of "war" but are no less lethal and destructive. This calls for a broader definition of war to encompass dimensions of non-militarized conflicts and means of engagement.*

War is the bane of humanity. It conjures images of death, suffering and destruction. Yet, war is very part of our history. Martial skills and leadership are honored and remembered. Long after their demise, military leaders such as Alexander the Great, Caesar and Sultan Saladin, and their exploits continue to capture our imaginations, and if the success of *Alexander* and *Patton* is any indication, our popular culture as well. The mass media has also helped to perpetuate the heroism of wartime leaders. For example, the 1998 US TV documentary honors the nine US five-star generals as "Gods of War."[10] Notwithstanding the commercialization and even the romanticization of war, it remains humanity's greatest challenge to rid the world of this scourge. War is very much intertwined with the development of humanity. "The written history of the world is largely a history of warfare, because the states within which we live came into existence largely through conquest, civil strife or struggles for independence."[11] Indeed, according to John Keegan, "warfare is as old as man himself".[12] As man evolved through the ages, surely war has changed as well. War is a complex and dynamic social phenomenon. This paper attempts to examine how the traditional definition of "war" measures up to contemporary conflicts. It argues that war – in its exclusive – focus as an inter-state interaction and its preoccupation with the use of armed violence misses out on various dimensions of threats that challenges state sovereignty and security. This paper contains three sections. First, it lays out the definitions of war. Second, it argues that wars fought for territorial conquest is losing its relevance. The third section lays out the argument that the underlining principle of war as a type of conflict remains, but the means to wage wars goes beyond the use of armed violence. Thus, while the traditional means of warfare though the use of force is waning, it has brought to fore "new" means of warfare.

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[10]  These are General George C. Marshall, General Douglas MacArthur, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, General Omar N. Bradley, Admiral William D. Leahy, Admiral Ernest J. King, Admiral Chester Nimitz, Admiral William F. «Bull» Halsey and General Henry Arnold.

[11]  John Keegan, A History of Warfare (London: Hutchinson, 1993), p. 386.

[12]  Ibid., p. 3.

## Defining "War"

Carl von Clausewitz saw war as "an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will."[13] It is a contest of will between two parties with the ultimate aim to defeat the enemy. He offered that "[s]o as long as I have not overthrown my opponent I am bound to fear he may overthrow me."[14] He further noted that "... if you are to force the enemy, by making war on him, to do your bidding, you must either make him literally defenseless or at least put him in a position that makes this danger probable."[15] War, in the Clausewitzian world, takes on a zero-sum perspective. The goal of warfare is to disarm and render the enemy weak or vulnerable. In a more recent explanation of war, Quincy Wright defined war as a "conflict among political groups, especially sovereign states, carried on by armed forces of considerable magnitude or a considerable period of time."[16] In a review of definitions used by various scholars, Benjamin Most and Harvey Starr outlined war as events to involve:

(a) at least two parties, one of which is a nation;

(b) conflictual goals;

(c) parties that are aware of their conflicting goals;

(d) parties that are willing to attain a goal which they recognize conflicts with the wishes of other(s);

(e) situations in which each party has the opportunity or capacity to pursue its goal;

(f) situations in which at least one party is able to resist another's use of overt military force to the extent that it avoids "immediate" defeat, suffers a minimal number of casualties, and/or inflicts a minimal number of casualties on the other(s); and

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[13] Carl von Clausewitz, On War (edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret) (London: Everyman, 1993), p.83.

[14] Ibid., p. 86.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Martin A. Nettleship, "Definitions" in Martin A. Nettleship, R. Dalegivnes, Anderson Nettleship (Eds.) War, Its Causes and Correlates (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1975), p. 81.

(g) situations in which no party that is willing to use overt military force can attain its goal with only a single use of force or with a series of such acts that are highly dispersed over time.[17]

Summing up the various definitions and perspectives on war, Most and Starr defines war as ...

> a particular type of outcome of the interaction of at least dyadic sets of specified varieties of actors in which at least one actor is willing and able to use some specified amount of military force for some specified of time against some other, resisting actor and in which some specified minimal number of fatalities (greater than zero) occur.[18]

It is clear from the definitions aforementioned that war is seen as an activity that involves the use of force involving at least two parties. As only states enjoy the monopoly on the use of force and organized violence, it is easy to understand why wars are often associated with states. In the Clausewitzian world, wars were indeed the purview of states. In fact, he explained that "war is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means."[19] Waging war is a tool to protect and further a state's interest. However, the validity of war as the sole purview of states is tenuous. Although most wars involve states, increasingly wars involve non-state actors. Thus, defining wars as an exclusive armed confrontation between states do not have the same ring to it in the days of Clausewitz as they do today. Wars have changed and have grown out of the strictures of the Clausewitzian mold. The Correlates of War (COW) project addressed this anomaly. Small and Singer employed a tripartite categorization of war: interstate, extrastate and intracommunal. All three typologies of wars must fulfill the criteria of incurring at least 1,000 battle deaths and involves the use of force. They are differentiated

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[17] Benjamin A. Most & Harvey Starr, "Conceptualizing 'War": Consequences for Theory and Research" in Diehl, Paul, War, Vol. 1 (London: Sage, 2005). p. 43.

[18] Ibid.

[19] von Clausewitz, On War, p. 99.

by the actors. Interstate wars are fought between states. Extrastate wars are "armed conflicts between states and nonstate political entities."[20] Intracommunal wars are "fought between two groups within the state (neither party being the government)[21] and have a decidedly domestic focus. In contrast, interstate and extrastate wars are international conflicts. These categories of war clearly spell out the parties involved and the use of force resulting in a set number of casualties. The numerical threshold was set as a criteria for armed conflicts to "qualify" as a war to enable a realistic study of the phenomenon by eliminating armed confrontations of "minor" consequences. The casualty criterion is undoubtedly an academic construct, but it is a pragmatic solution to represent the gravity and seriousness of the business that is war.

Other scholars have attempted to improve the specificity of wars. Mary Kaldor argued the existence of a breed of "new wars" that are "rooted in divergent claims to power based on national, clan, religious or linguistic characteristics."[22] "New wars" reflects the emergence of a type of warfare based on identities to forge its own independent political entity. An example of such wars is Bosnia-Herzegovenia. This kind of war sought "to control the population by getting rid of everyone of a different identity ... Hence the strategic goal of these wars is population expulsion through various means, such as mass killing, forcible resettlement, as well as a range of political, psychological and economic techniques of intimidation."[23] Chris Gray used the nomenclature "postmodern war" to highlight the extensive use of technology and computers in the conduct of war. Specifically, this type of "warfare is exemplified by the Gulf War, in which the strategy and tactics of the winning coalition were facilitated by sophisticated high-technology data generating and information-processing equipment, and battlefield engagements often approximated a form of "cyberwar" where belligerents (primarily in the case of the UN coalition) relied on high-technology "smart" weapon systems to

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[20] Errol A. Henderson & J. David Singer, "'New Wars and Rumors of 'New Wars'" in Diehl, Paul, War, Vol. 1 (London: Sage, 2005), p. 413.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Henderson & Singer, p. 400

[23] Ibid.

engage the adversary."[24] Edward Rice's "war of the third kind" focused "on protracted, generally nonconventional, largely intrastate wars that typified the armed conflicts raging throughout the postcolonial (third) world in the post-World War II era."[25] Meanwhile, Kalevi Holsti's "people's war" "are primarily guerilla campaigns fought by militarized communal groups against either government forces or other militarized groups within the states.[26] Between the typologies of wars offered by Kaldor, Gray, Rice and Holsti, it covers a broad range of wars that are primarily domestic in orientation. Gray's postmodern war stands apart from the other formulations in that it focused in the advances in the tools of warfare and how technology transformed wars. To be sure, the advent of new inventions had changed the form and scope of warfare. Karen Mingst's summary of the evolution of warfare as shown in Table 1 depicts how a physical confrontation had grown into a complex and multifaceted duel.

## The Diminishing Returns Of Conquest And War

Historically, wars are associated with the conquest of territories. The acquisition and control of territories bring to the conqueror prestige, power and wealth. Land is linked to riches. Land – assuming the successful pacification of the vanquished – brings to the victorious party additional workforce. Land is also tied to economic power. Land, along with additional workforce, increases the capacity of the state to support a larger population base, which in turn strengthens the state's productive capacity. Additionally, the economic base of the state is increased by the sources of wealth derived from mining activities such as coal, steel, oil and other minerals. Thus, it is easy to understand the allure of states to solidify their power bases through conquest. This is the prime reason for imperialism. From the diamond mines in South Africa to the tin mines in Malaya, control of strategic and high-value minerals and products through conquest had brought immense wealth

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[24]   Ibid., p. 401.

[25]   Ibid., p. 401.

[26]   Ibid., p. 402.

to the colonial masters. In other words, conquest pays.

If conquest is as alluring as depicted, why doesn't wars happen more frequently now? Why work when it is more efficient to steal and plunder? Why buy when you can own and control the sources of supply? The coming of globalization had all but rendered the benefits of conquest irrelevant. Stephen Brooks argued that the globalization of production affects the benefits of conquest. He attributed this phenomenon to four factors: (a) the rise of knowledge-based economies, (b) the increase geographic dispersion of production, (c) the increase significance of interfirm alliances, and (d) increase ease of foreign direct investment (FDI).[27] We would examine each in turn.

In the postwar era, most advanced industrialized countries had begun to move from "economies based on land (agriculture/industrial economies) to ones primarily based on human capital (knowledge-based economies).[28] Mass education empowers the population and the institutionalization of "k-economy" enabled a wider segment of the population who possesses specialized or relevant expertise to be the generators and carrier of national wealth. Concomitantly, these individuals would withhold their expertise and refuse to work with the conquerors, hence effectively negatively impacting the benefits of conquest.

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[27]   Stephen G. Brooks, "The Globalization of Production and the Changing Benefits of Conquest," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 43, No. 5 (October 1999), pp. 655-666.

[28]   Ibid., p. 655.

**Table 1** : How War Fighting Has Changed Over Time

| PERIOD | MEANS |
|---|---|
| Prehistoric times | Clubs; rocks; bands of tribes. |
| Ancient times | Swords; shields; spears; arrows; chariots; cavalry; Romans used precise tactics with infantry and cavalry in coordination; Mongols used cavalry and foraged off the land. |
| Medieval times | Fortifications and castles; introduction and use of longbow; gunpowder and cannons. |
| Eighteenth century through | Increased emphasis on naval warfare and control of |
| The American Civil War | seas; shifting formations of infantry; rifling of guns and cannons for greater range; rise of professional armies. |
| World War I | Trench warfare; chemical weapons; introduction of tanks and aircraft; large - scale use of machine guns; submarine warfare. |
| World War II | Blitzkrieg combines tactical airpower with rapid armor advances to achieve operational objectives beyond merely attacking frontline forces; strategic bombardment takes war |

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|---|---|
| | beyond front lines to populace and production centers; first truly global war; introduction of nuclear weapons. |
| Cold War | Nuclear standoff with triad of long-range bombers, land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles and submarine-launched ballistic missiles; air forces developed long-range missiles and precision delivery capabilities; land forces became heavily armored maneuverable units. |
| 1991 Gulf War to the Present | Dramatic increase in precision weapons and delivery technology; space exploitation affords information dominance in communications and intelligence; new protective technologies dramatically reduce combat deaths and injuries; de-emphasis of nuclear weapons; miniaturization of equipment enables combatants to conceal supplies; more sophisticated small chemical and biological weapons make terrorism easier to carry out; increased availability of small arms in international trade makes limited wars, civil wars, and terrorism easier to carry out. |

Source: Karen Mingst, *Essentials of International Relations*, 3$^{rd}$. Ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), p. 209.

The geographical dispersion of production makes it more difficult for the conqueror to obtain the full benefits of conquest. Firms, in their search

for increased profits, have ventured beyond their home base and set up production bases in multiple areas. Advancement in communications had made it easier for the home base to coordinate and manage its subsidiaries located in multiple locations. "The increased geographic dispersion of production means that the conquering an advance country might result in possession of only a portion of the value-added chain."[29] Capturing the entire network would be costly and time-consuming. In other words, the dispersion of production had divided the "prize" in multiple locations, thereby reducing the attraction of conquest.

The high costs associated with research and development had led to the increasing rise of inter-firm alliances. Besides the benefits of sharing the costs and risks of development, firms can also draw on the synergistic effects of such alliances. "For those firms within the conquered economy that are highly dependent on maintaining interfirm alliances with firms in other countries, and hence their productivity, might be imperiled by conquest." "Firms often have may different potential alliance partners from which to choose and are less likely to rely on a firm within a conquered territory whose ability to be a useful partner could be abruptly cut off at any moment."[30]

States are rational actors. When presented with an array of options, it would behave "rationally" by choosing the most optimal choice. War is far from a cost-free option. Foreign direct investment is an option for states (or firms) to gain access and control foreign assets without resorting to the use of force. "The increased ease of engaging in FDI has meant that it has become progressively easier for many of the most economically advanced states to achieve most of the same ends of conquest without any of the costs (e.g. administrative burden, diplomatic isolation, war costs of taking territory, military reprisals by third parties)."[31]

The arguments laid out by Brooks present a strong case that developed economies are unlikely to wage war because the spoils of

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[29]  Ibid., p. 660-661.

[30]  Ibid., p. 664.

[31]  Ibid., p. 665-666.

victory have reduced dramatically in the last fifty years. The primary cause for this development is the chances undergone by the international economic system, specifically the globalization of production. The levels of interconnectedness of the global economy would give pause to any aggressor bent on territorial aggrandizement. The US experience in Iraq aptly showed the difficulties to pacify and control a population that is bounded by strong nationalism and anti-Americanism. Has globalization succeeded in muffling the drums of war and ushered in a period of peace and prosperity?

## War And Warfare

It is important to note that Brooks' arguments are confined to conquests and not necessarily war itself. The spread and maturation of globalization does not make obsolete wars. As Robert Gilpin reminds us, "one of the principle functions of war, [...] is to determine the international hierarchy of prestige and thereby determine which states will in effect govern the international system."[32] Furthermore, "[a] country that would like to abolish war, however, must continue to be concerned about those that have kept it in their repertoire."[33] Wars are fought for reasons other than economic. It remains the ultimate arbiter of conflicts among states. Even the vaunted ideals of collective security rely on the threat of punishment through war to maintain peace. To say that war is relevant is different from saying that wars are everyday occurrences. Wars are an integral facet of the international system.

Fundamentally, war is a type of conflict. It is accorded a special position due to its ability to change and influence society and states. The scale of destruction attendant with wars is enough to merit the birth of a new discipline in the social sciences. International relations had its genesis to examine the question of war and peace. As long as conflicts

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[32]  Robert Gilpin, War & Change in World Politics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 33.

[33]  Mueller, "The Obsolescence of Major War," in Diehl, Paul, War, Vol. 1 (London: Sage, 2005), p. 303.

are endemic in social affairs, wars cannot be ruled out and will continue to feature – one way or another – in international affairs. Having said that, it is important to distinguish between war and warfare. The former is a subset of conflict, while the latter refers to means of waging war. War remains a constant but the ways in which the contest is played out is changing. James Dunnigan, for example, explained that "[t]he next war is going to take place in a new battlefield; your own home. Cyberwarfare is the battle for the control of the Internet and the large chunk of our economy that now depends on this network of computers.[34] In a scenario dubbed "an electronic Pearl Harbor," "some country or terrorist might attack U.S. computers in one sudden bolt-out-of-the-blue strike, cause death, destruction, and mayhem. Armies would not be able to leave their barracks. Airlines would fall out of the skies. Wall Street would collapse."[35] In explaining the electronic Pearl Harbor, Bruce Berkowitz may have taken some literary liberty to simplify the ease in which such a probable attack might take place and its consequences. Nevertheless, cyberwarfare represents a new class of warfare that is distinguished from its traditional variant. In cyberwarfare, the "warriors" do not meet and such wars are not exclusively targeted at military targets. It seeks out vulnerable points and exploits them to disrupt or incapacitate the daily lives of its target. Robert Mandel noted that:

Many analysts now argue that disrupting or distorting security information systems, rather than attacking traditional military targets, will be the primary thrust of future wars. If each system becomes the center of gravity for modern militaries, it becomes the logical targets of others, and for this reason information warfare is often cited as the leitmotif of early 21st century conflict.[36]

By gaining access and control of critical electronic nodes and electronic networks, these "hackers" can effectively render a nation's defenses hapless given our near-total reliance on computers and electronic

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[34] James F. Dunnigan, The Next War Zone: Confronting the Global Threat of Cyberterrorism (New York: Citadel Press, 2002), p. 5.

[35] Bruce Berkowitz, The New Face of War: How War Will Be Fought in the 21st Century ((New York: The Free Press, 2003), p. 140.

[36] Robert Mandel, Security, Strategy and the Quest for Bloodless War (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2004), p. 126.

communications. "Modern warfare requires more than ever before speedy and reliable data on targets and coordination of multifaceted strategy and tactics in the field, and operating blind – even when possessing overwhelming force advantages – is a sure path to defeat."[37] Thus, instead of taking the battle to the military, cyberwarfare takes on a wide range of targets and this effectively extends the "battlefield" to an indefinite specification of space. This is a departure from traditional warfare and raises the specter if the Clausewitzian formulation of war is suited to contemporary times when threats are manifested beyond invading armies. Nonetheless, "invasions" can and could be mounted in other forms. Besides cyberwarfare, wars are "fought" on many fronts. One such fronts is trade wars.

Economic competition is a normal conduct in international affairs. However, trade wars represent a heightened state of affairs where parties involved are engaged in "abnormal" competition. The trade war between Japan and the US during the 1980s was not just about differences over Japan's favorable trade surplus vis-à-vis the US but threats of economic sanctions (e.g. non-tariff barriers and import restrictions) would do irreparable harm to the Japanese economy.

States are also highly sensitive to challenges to its political stability and legitimacy. For this reason, governments monitor and often exert some form of control over the mass dissemination of news and information. However, in the age of Internet, the state's stranglehold on information and electronic content is slipping. The Chinese government, for example, closely monitors the Internet to identify and arrest subversive elements. Information is power and the ease in which information is sent and received over the Internet renders it increasingly for states to isolate its citizens from news outside its territory. During the Cold War, the US sponsored and ran Radio Free Europe, beaming a constant flow of pro-West (and anti-communist) information into Eastern Europe was an attempt to destabilize communist rule. This is yet another plane in which states utilize to protect and further their national interest. In the case of the communist states, their "battle" was to jam the transmission of Radio Free Europe. Clearly, warfare is not limited to the exchange of gunfire and could be fought in multiple channels, and

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[37]    Ibid.

in this case, the airwaves of Eastern Europe.

## Conclusion

The Clausewitzian conception of war remains valid. Wars are fought not only to subdue and, if possible, annihilate the enemy but as Clausewitz pointed out serve a political objective. Brooks' contention that conquest does not pay is taken. However, not all wars are fought for this end. War is undoubtedly a clash of wills by using force. This narrow conception limits wars to the physical violence. The objective of war goes beyond the protection of territorial integrity. It involves the imperative to secure the viability of the state and its citizens. A challenge to state sovereignty could be mounted without a direct attack on its military. If the goal is not conquest, there is no compelling reason to target the military. Instead "soft targets" such as the civilian population are easier prey as the perpetrators of the 11 September attacks reasoned. In fact, more than anything this terrorist attack shows the weakness of the formal definition of war. Wars are fought on different fronts. The days where soldiers line up on both ends of the battlefield to await their orders before attacking the enemy are numbered. When states can be attacked through non-lethal ways and in an indirect manner without any physical engagement, it gives pause to viability of seeing war as an armed conflict. The threat is changing and so too must our perspective on war. War remains a conflict involving at least one state but the nature of warfare must be broadened to take into account emerging and new forms of threats.

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**Dr. Tang Siew Mun**
School of History, Politics and Strategic Studies
Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
(smtang@ukm.my)